

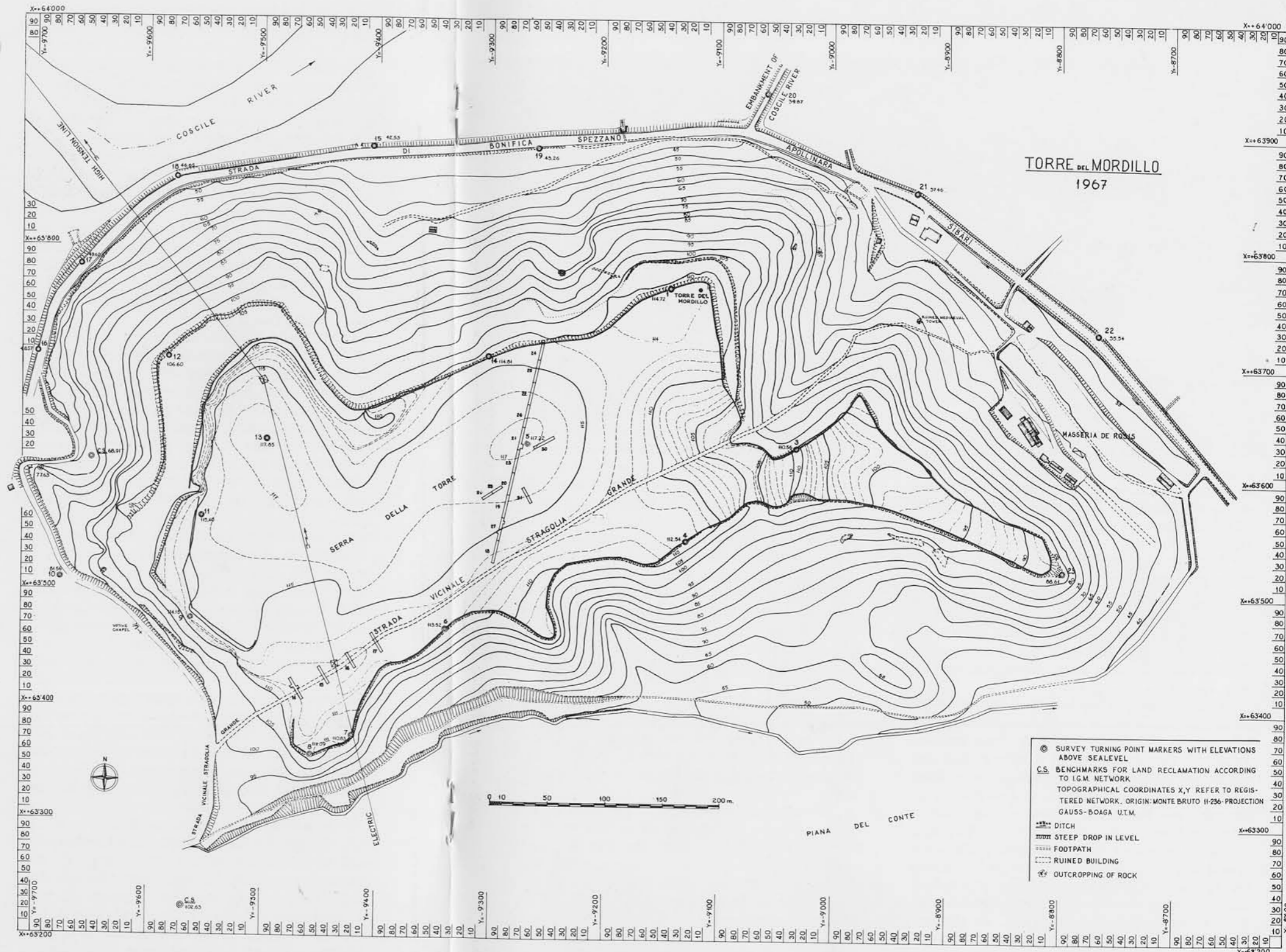
# Torre Mordillo 1967

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Excavations at Torre Mordillo in Calabria in Southern Italy were undertaken during September and October, 1967, as a joint operation of the University Museum and the Soprintendenza alle Antichità della Calabria. Not the first excavations here (*Expedition 9, 1967*), those of 1967 were undertaken primarily with the thought of testing further to see whether or not the site might be that of ancient Thurii, a famous colony sent out from Greece in the 440's of the 5th century B.C. under the auspices of Pericles of Athens. The previous work had suggested that the period of occupation of Torre Mordillo did indeed encompass that of Thurii. Occupation prior to the time of the founding of the city was, it was true, also attested, going back to about 1000 B.C., but this could not be regarded as an insurmountable objection since the colonists might well have chosen an advantageously situated, previously occupied site such as this for their city. It would have been in antiquity a site of choice in the area both for trade with the interior and for defense: a big, long and broad hilltop with three steep sides overlooking the confluence of two rivers, the modern Coscile and the Esaro, at one of the major points of entry from the mountainous region behind into the Sybaris plain at the east.

Two objectives motivated us in the placement of the trenches indicated on the site plan, one to obtain an idea of the nature of the layout of the city of Torre Mordillo, the other to determine the date of the city wall which we already knew was present, rimming the edges of the hilltop. Our ancient sources for Thurii told us that the initial efforts of the colonists in the 5th century were directed toward the general layout of the city, evidently on a grid plan, and to the erection of its defensive system of walls. What



we actually found in our eight weeks' season was not what we had hoped. It seldom is in archaeology. What we did find was different. It may be, however, that in our site we do have one

which has some connection with Thurii, and in this aspect the site may well be very worthy of much fuller excavation.

The following composite plate provides some

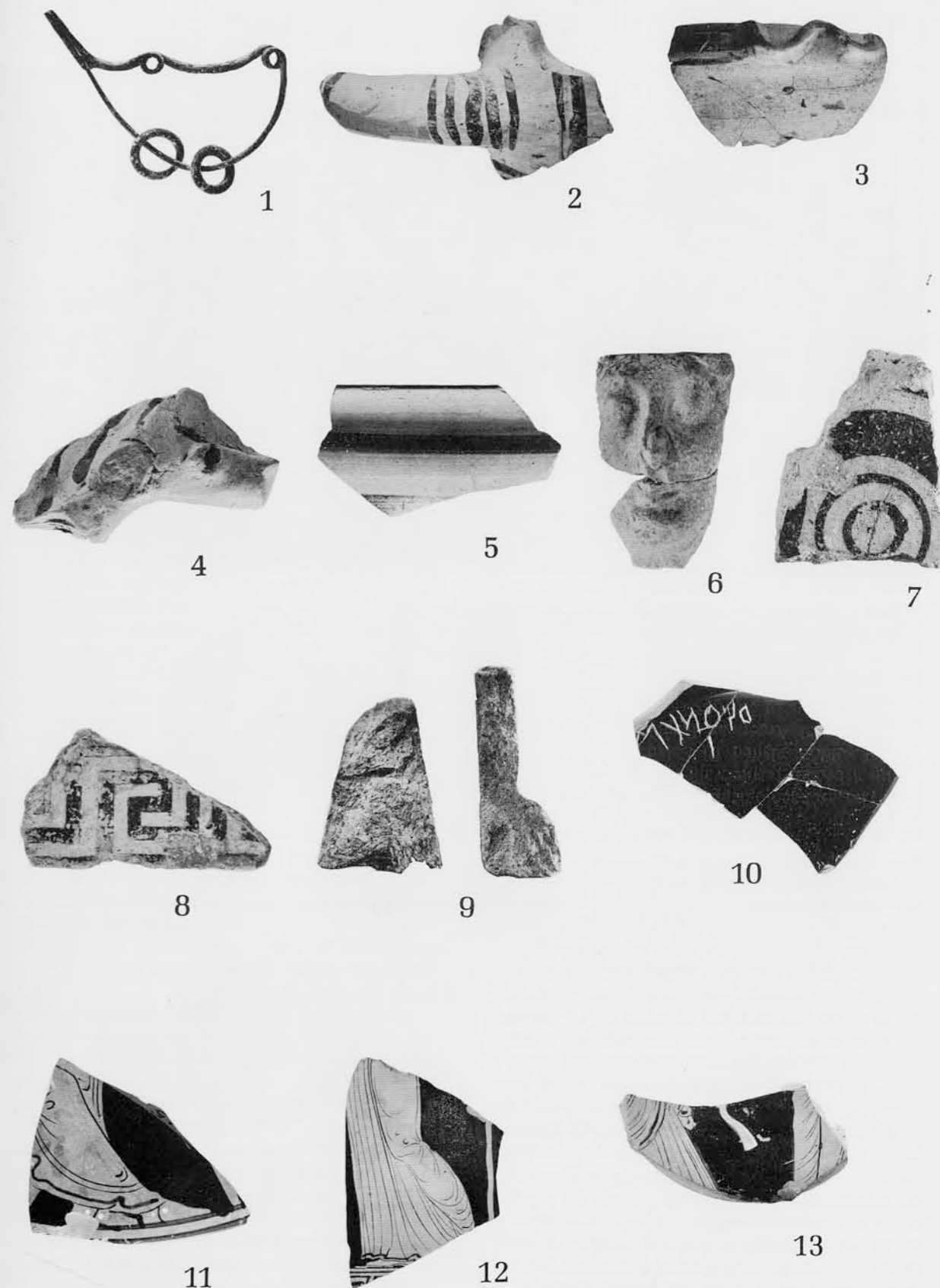
of the indications of the history and character of the site of Torre Mordillo. Few of the pieces illustrated come from stratified deposits, however, for reasons which will become clear. We



already knew from previous work here that the site was occupied as early as the early years of the first millennium B.C. Certain pieces found in 1967 have tentatively prompted the thought that the site may have been occupied even earlier, but this aspect will require further study and information. At any rate, we are on firm ground in seeing indication of inhabitation of the site in the 8th century B.C. in a large bronze fibula (1) and, probably, in the 7th in two pottery fragments (2 and 3), both of white-ground wares, the former with banded decoration in black, the latter, part of a dish, decorated in black and red and with the added embellishment of a serpentine appliqué. These all are clearly to be related to indigenous inhabitation of the site. The next three suggest that the site in the later years of the 7th century was at least coming into contact with Greeks, if not actually inhabited by them. A horse's head (4) in pottery fabric, perhaps once provided with an inset glass paste eye, is referable to the Greek tradition of these days. Traces of the attachment of a rider's hand are visible on the neck. A fragment of a drinking bowl (5), an Ionian kylix, is of Greek type, of the third quarter of the 6th century. A head of a female figurine (6), of fine workmanship and distinctive character, is to be placed in the same period or perhaps a bit earlier. Its quality invites the speculation that it may be a product of wealthy and elusive Sybaris which flourished in these times in the adjoining plain. In the late years of the 6th century, perhaps still within the lifetime of Sybaris, which was destroyed in 510 B.C., there is evidence that a building of architectural pretension, probably a temple, was erected on the site. Fragments of two different kinds of terracotta architectural sheathing, revet-

ment plaques, (7 and 8), no doubt for a building of mud brick and timber construction, both decorated with black designs on the natural ground, were found near the center of the hilltop. It is tempting to associate with them a fragment of a roof tile (9, left), obviously from a building of large scale, found in the same area. Its implications for the great size of the building to which it belonged are indicated by comparison with a fragment of a domestic roof tile beside it at the right. The temple and its size are speculative. So also, even more tenuously so, is the thought of an association with it of a fragment of an Attic drinking cup, a kylix, of the first quarter of the 5th century B.C. (10) inscribed retrograde in graffito with an incomplete name in Greek. The name could be restored in several ways. One possible restoration is as the name of the Greek god Dionysos, the god of wine, and the cup to which it belonged might have been dedicated at our temple. The inscription is interesting, in any case, for the lettering is a late example of the use of the archaic script of the colonies of Achaia in old Greece in this area of Italy.

Material of Greek origin or produced under Greek influence in Italy of subsequent years is much more abundant at Torre Mordillo. We may hopefully suppose that in the course of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. the site did become Greek, not indigenous. Two fragments, one probably of Athenian manufacture (11), showing a seated man, and the other (12), South Italian produced in imitation of Attic, are both of the latter years of the 5th century, years following the time when Thurii was established. A third (13), again South Italian, from a large open dish or plate, is of the 4th century.





The inner face  
of the city wall  
of Torre Mordillo.



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Excavation at Torre Mordillo in this season revealed no structure, aside from tenuous remains of one of the early years of the millennium, of the periods so far covered, even though we excavated to virgin soil in almost all our trenches, either extensively or in spot checks. The absence of structures of early date in the areas where we dug is evidently due to levelling off of early accumulations on the top of the hill to provide a regular surface for the laying out of a new city in the early years of the 3rd century. At this time a city wall was built. Excavation against its inner face and across it showed, in addition



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to evidence for its date, that a cobbled alley provided access to it, and that it was massive, some two to three meters thick. Evidently at this time also the structures of the new city were laid out on a regular plan, the main alignment of the buildings being from roughly northeast to



Ann and Oliver Colburn, members of the expedition staff, with some of the ballista balls.

southwest. An open pebbled area in the center of the hilltop, estimated to be at least 50 by 70 meters in size, was probably the public square or agora of the new establishment. Material referable to the brief lifetime of the new city, within the 3rd century, is plentiful. Three pottery vessels (14), perfume bottles called unguentaria, are typical of the time, as are also a pottery relief medallion showing a satyr and a goat (15), and a terracotta head of a young girl (16). The new city, in our present point of view, came to a violent end in the closing years of the 3rd century. The violence of its demise was amply demonstrated in excavation at the western entrance to the site, which revealed a long stretch of the cobbled alleyway which presumably served the city wall here. Stone ballista balls, the ancient cannonballs, as well as numerous weapon points in iron and bronze, were found in abundance on the paving and in the filling above it. The ballista balls were of two different kinds of stone, one perhaps for the defenders, one for the attackers, and in each kind of stone four different sizes were represented. The bulk of the coinage from the site being of dates prior to the end of the 3rd century, we are inclined to think that the effective end of the city's existence was due to the activities of the Carthaginian invader Hannibal in the very late years of the century. A few coins of later date, going down into the 1st century B.C., may perhaps be referable to casual later visits to the exposed site of an abandoned city.

Much in the history of Torre Mordillo as so far ascertained does prompt us to think of Thuri, including its existence in the time of

Thurii and its Greek character during these times. An official lead sealing (17), found close to the potential public square of the site, inscribed with the abbreviation of the name of Thurii and probably once affixed to a perishable public document of that city, provides an even more cogent clue of a connection. Our future thinking about the site might do well to entertain a different speculation, however, that Thurii itself may lie elsewhere, somewhere, like its spiritual predecessor Sybaris, in or near the alluvial plain, nearer the sea, and that what we do have here is not Thurii itself but perhaps, reasonably so in view of its setting at the juncture of mountains and plain, a frontier outpost of the territory which Thurii controlled. The presence of a 3rd century city plan, not a 5th century one, is not wholly against the identification of Torre Mordillo as Thurii, for in the 3rd century levelling an earlier plan may have been erased. The fact that a single wall, one of the 3rd century, has appeared and no indication of one of the 5th in our long trench across the site is probably more indicative, however, that the site is not that of the city we sought.

We do not seem to have Thurii, itself. We may have, however, if it is indeed a frontier outpost of the city, something almost as good, a readily excavated site of people of Thurii which might tell us much that we would like to know about Thurii proper and its life and times. Should Thurii itself lie, like Sybaris, beneath an almost insuperable overburden of alluvial soil, the thought of Torre Mordillo as an alternative source of information about Thurii would be a welcome one indeed.